

MARGARITA MADNESS

Cape saloon takes tangy tequila title

A Cinco de Mayo search for Southwest Florida's best margarita leads to some salty competition.

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consider it one of the rigors of my line of work; having to carefully calculate a ratio of margaritas to food that won't result in a cab ride home.

Drinking on the job is frowned upon. Drinking as your job? It's an honor usually reserved for sommeliers and Belgian monks. And for the last few weeks: Me.

In preparation for Cinco de Mayo on Sunday, our Margarita Madness contest started a little more than a month ago with a simple Facebook post asking folks to nominate their favorite margarita places. Hundreds of votes for dozens of drinks poured in, and the top 32 earned a seed in the Margarita Madness bracket.

Upsets were many. When the dust settled Bubba's Roadhouse & Saloon in Cape Coral won, shaking off competitors week after week to stand alone atop the salt-rimmed heap. I visited the restaurants that advanced to the Eight on the Rocks round. Plus I was granted two saves to apply to two places I thought had been unfairly booted. Of those 10 restaurants, my five favorites are listed here.



Janelle Kahle relaxes Friday at Agave Southwestern Grill in Naples. Kahle is the beverage manager. KINFAY MOROTI/THE NEWS-PRESS

JLB'S PICK



The Private Label, left, and House Silver margaritas are among those featured at Agave Southwestern Grill. KINFAY MOROTI/THE NEWS-PRESS

AND THE WINNER IS ...

» Agave Southwestern Grill

During happy hour, which lasts from open to 7:30 p.m. daily, Agave's house silver margarita is just \$4.50. That's a pittance for this perfectly balanced, dangerously smooth cocktail. Crafted from Cazadores tequila that's made from 100 percent agave juices with no sugars or fillers, this margarita comes from Agave's expert bartenders shaking in Triple Sec, fresh lime juice, a squeeze of agave nectar and their house-made limeade. You'll find no syrupy mixers here, nothing artificial whatsoever. The watermelon-cilantro margarita is made from freshly muddled melon speckled with the fresh herb. And if you want to upgrade your tequila you have more than 200 means of doing so, more than any other area restaurant.

» **Details:** 2380 Vanderbilt Beach Road, Naples; 598-3473; agavenaples.com
» **Price:** \$9 to \$15 for most margaritas, half-price from 11:30 a.m.-7:30 p.m. daily



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Watch video of Agave Southwestern Grill's beverage manager Janelle Kahle making the restaurant's award-winning margarita.

THE REST OF THE TOP FIVE



The house margarita from Los Cabos Cantina & Tequila Bar
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House margarita from Cantina Laredo
SPECIAL TO THE NEWS-PRESS



The Awesome Margarita from Square 1 Burgers & Bar.



The house margarita from Iguana Mia.

» 2. Los Cabos Cantina & Tequila Bar

This downtown Fort Myers resto-bar serves only 100 percent Agave tequilas, 66 of them give or take. Here house margaritas are made with fresh limeade – a tangy concoction of lime juice and organic sugar – Agave Blanco tequila and Triple Sec. They have a subtle sweetness about them, with a boozy kick that's unmistakable. A garnish of orange in addition to the usual lime was a nice touch. The plush, cowboy-leather booths on which you can enjoy your cocktail don't hurt either.

» **Details:** 2226 First St., downtown Fort Myers; 332-2226; facebook.com/LosCabosCantinaTequilaBar
» **Price:** Margaritas start at \$8, half-price during happy hour

Like other things in Cape Coral, the Bubbarita from Bubba's Roadhouse & Saloon is certifiably huge. At 46 ounces, it's enough for a small bachelorette party. A hefty kick of Jose Cuervo and a bright balance of lime make it the perfect counterpoint to one of the restaurant's fat, juicy burgers.



To see how Bubba's beat out 31 other restaurants to claim the Margarita Madness fan title, visit news-press.com/margarita.

The Bubbarita from Bubba's Roadhouse & Saloon in Cape Coral was voted fan favorite in the Margarita Madness contest.
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The criteria

I ordered house margaritas and, when available, premium margaritas at each of the restaurants and bars I visited. I was looking for a healthy kick of tequila, a limy tang and a clean finish. I also took tequila selection into account as a secondary factor behind flavor.

The contenders

» **The Eight on the Rocks finalists:** Bubba's Roadhouse & Saloon, Charley's Cabana Bar at Sanibel Harbour Resort & Spa, Cinco Amigos, Iguana Mia, Los Cabos Cantina & Tequila Bar, The Office Pub, Square 1 Burgers & Bar, Rumrunners
» **My two saves:** Agave Southwestern Grill, Cantina Laredo

THE FAN FAVORITE

